

Between Tradition and Digitality: The Hybridity of Islamic Identity Among Indonesian Millennial Muslims

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Abstract: Abstract

This study examines the formation of Islamic identity among Indonesian millennial Muslims amid massive digital transformation. Employing a qualitative approach supported by a survey of 670 respondents across seven major cities (September 2022–February 2023), the research analyzes identity dynamics through the frameworks of primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism, elaborated with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Findings reveal that Islamic identity is not formed through a linear shift from tradition to digital modernity, but through simultaneous dialectical negotiation. Identity legitimacy remains rooted in family bonds (80.63%) and ascribed identity (83.92%), while engagement in digital religious discourse is lowest (57.76%). Notably, religious community interaction via digital spaces reaches 91.98%, indicating that technology functions as an additional arena of articulation rather than a source of fundamental religious values. Millennial Muslim identity is hybrid in nature—preserving traditional religio-cultural roots while reflexively adapting to the digital ecosystem through continuous social negotiation within a third space. This identity construction is relational, contextual, and cannot be understood reductionistically.

Keywords: Islamic Identity, Millennial Muslims, Digital Transformation, Identity Hybridity, Third Space.

1. Introduction

Digital transformation has emerged as a structural force that fundamentally reconfigures social, cultural, and symbolic relations in contemporary life. The massive expansion of information technology has not merely altered patterns of communication and knowledge distribution, but has also reshaped how individuals construct their identities in the religious domain (Constantin et al., 2024; Indriyani & Khadiq, 2023). Within this framework, digital space no longer functions solely as a medium for community interaction, but has transformed into an active social arena for the articulation of meaning and religious symbolization in an open manner (Adam, 2017; Amin, 2018).

The generation most intensively experiencing this transformation is the millennial generation—particularly millennial Muslims living at the crossroads between digital modernity and the heritage of religious tradition (Nurhayati et al., 2022). They are not merely passive consumers of technology, but active social actors who participate in shaping new religious expressions that are hybrid, adaptive, and fluid across various contexts (Adam, 2017). Islamic identity within this group is no longer built exclusively through formal religious institutions, but is also constructed through interactions on social media platforms, digital communities, and continually evolving virtual spaces (Nurfitriana, 2023; Ichwan et al., 2024).

A number of prior studies indicate that social media has become a central space in the formation of identity, the expression of religiosity, and the religious practices of millennial Muslims. Digital platforms have been transformed into a medium for Islamic outreach (dakwah), an arena for informal religious learning, and a space for the growth of new traditionalism among younger generations (Bamualim et al., 2018; Lailiyah, 2016; Nurhayati et al., 2022). These findings affirm that religiosity in the digital age is no longer fully subordinate to formal institutions, but has shifted toward a relatively autonomous system with its own social logic (Bamualim et al., 2018).

In Indonesia, the intensity of digital connectivity provides a strong structural foundation for this process. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2020) records that more than 64% of Indonesia's population is connected to the internet, with the millennial generation representing the dominant segment. This condition is reinforced by a study from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, 2017), which found that social media—particularly Facebook, WhatsApp, and other instant messaging platforms—constitutes the primary space for daily interaction among the millennial generation. This is what makes digital space a strategic arena in the formation of social and religious identity among Indonesian Muslims.

The dynamics of religiosity in Indonesia cannot be separated from a broader social context. A Pew Research Center survey reveals that Indonesia's level of religiosity is among the highest compared to the majority of other countries in the world; more than 85% of the population regards religion as the primary foundation of life (Tamir et al., 2020; Damarjati, 2020). This high level of religiosity is intertwined with the openness of digital space, which enables the entry of diverse religious interpretations and global cultural influences. The intensity of cross-cultural communication on social media renders digital space

a crucial arena for the negotiation, reproduction, and transformation of the religious identity of millennial Muslim generations (Astuti, 2017).

Recent studies also indicate that the millennial generation is a social group that lives simultaneously in digital and offline social spaces. Digitalization has become an inseparable part of their lives, yet it does not automatically erode the role of family, community, and local culture in identity formation (Wahid et al., 2019; Yuswohadi et al., 2014). The phenomenon of the hijrah movement, halal product consumption, digital religious study circles (pengajian), and sharia-based entertainment demonstrate that the Islamic identity of millennial Muslims grows within a complex, non-linear, and often ambivalent spectrum (Bamualim et al., 2018) (Nurfitria, 2023).

Although the literature on the digital religiosity of millennial Muslims has grown considerably, much of the existing research still concentrates on descriptive aspects—such as patterns of religious content consumption, typologies of religious expression on social media, or shifts in religious authority (Rachman et al., 2025) (James Zogby, Elizabeth Zogby, 2015) (Yunas et al., 2017). The available studies have not fully elaborated on how the Islamic identity of millennial Muslims is actively formed through the dialectic between primary social structures—family, community, local culture—and digital space as a symbolic arena. The dialectical relationship between the stability of traditional values and the dynamics of digitalization in the process of generational identity formation remains underexplored both empirically and analytically.

Through this intellectual gap, the present study offers a contribution to renewal by positioning millennial Muslims as socio-generational subjects who actively shape their Islamic identity at the intersection of local culture, social structure, and digital space. The findings of this study are expected to enrich the discourse on religious identity formation by affirming that digitalization does not replace the existing cultural-religious foundation, but rather reconfigures it through a continuous and multilayered process of social negotiation.

2. Literature Review

This study rests on three principal theoretical approaches to understanding identity construction as formulated by (Brown, 1997) (Bruce, 2000) (Schaefer, 2015), namely primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. These three approaches serve as the initial analytical framework for reading the dynamics of identity formation, which are

subsequently elaborated through Homi K. Bhabha's concept of identity hybridity.

The primordialist approach views identity as something stable, fixed, and ascribed. Identity is understood as something inherent in the individual from birth, developing throughout the course of human life as part of its social nature. Within this framework, identity is positioned as an entity relatively resistant to change over the long term, and tends to be bound to the social, cultural, and religious origins of the individual concerned.

In contrast to primordialism, the instrumentalist approach views identity as a symbolic resource that can be mobilized by dominant groups. Identity is not understood as something neutral, but as an instrument frequently exploited by political and economic elites for the purposes of social mobilization and power competition (Massafra, 2016). Within this perspective, the values that live within society can be rearticulated in accordance with the interests of particular groups. Constructivism, meanwhile, emphasizes identity as the product of a dynamic social process—a response to power relations, experiences of injustice, and structural pressures that surround a given group. Identity is therefore not static, but continuously reconstructed through social interaction and the accumulation of historical experience.

These three approaches serve as the analytical foundation, subsequently elaborated through Homi K. Bhabha's (2001) concept of identity hybridity. For Bhabha, hybridity emerges as an inevitable consequence of cultural encounter occurring within fluid social spaces that are never fully stable. The development of technology, as a manifestation of modernity, accelerates the formation of the third space—a space in which identity is continually produced, negotiated, and rearticulated. The thinning of geopolitical borders of the nation-state, resulting from the intensification of global interaction through developments in information technology, mass media, tourism, and various instruments of modern lifestyles, renders hybridity an almost unavoidable social consequence. In this context, hybridity is not understood as an anomaly but as a social necessity in the formation of contemporary cultural identity. Bhabha affirms that hybridity is the productivity of colonial power relations that work on the creation and transformation of cultural identity, thereby producing increasingly complex identity configurations (Sardar & Loon, 2001).

The process of cultural identity formation unfolds simultaneously and continuously within social space. The culture that is formed is never singular, but always involves cultural diversity associated with race, class, gender, and

particular traditions. Through intersubjective internalization that is collective in nature, cultural values and group interests are continuously negotiated in the social arena where differences are present and interact (Entwistle, 2002; Hussey, 2014; Park et al., 2015; Gobel et al., 2018).

Within a generational framework, (Mannheim, 1929) explains that a generation is a social construction shaped by commonality of age, historical experience, and participation in a particular social context. A generation can only share a collective identity when its members experience and respond to the same social events within a relatively similar historical period (Butler, 2018). The millennial generation is often understood as a social group that grew up in the era of digital technology, familiar with global mobility, gadget use, and the practice of sharing experiences through social media (Sari et al., 2020). Demographically, generations can be classified into three main groups: the Baby Boomer generation (1940–1960), Generation X (1965–1980), and the millennial generation (1981–2000s) (Salam et al., 2019). The differences between these generations lie primarily in their mastery of information technology and patterns of information utilization in daily life, with the millennial generation demonstrating a strong orientation toward fast, simultaneous, and instant access to information (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2017).

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach reinforced by survey data collected from millennial Muslims in a number of selected cities as a representative sample. The survey data covers three main dimensions: the variety and sources of identity, the patterns and mechanisms of identity formation, and the degree of openness to new cultural influences. Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire instrument designed to map the identity construction of millennial Muslims in Indonesia.

The study was conducted over the period from September 2022 to February 2023, with research locations encompassing seven cities selected representatively based on geographical and socio-cultural diversity: Padang City (West Sumatra Province), Bandung City (West Java Province), Yogyakarta City (Special Region of Yogyakarta Province), Palembang City (South Sumatra Province), Jakarta City (DKI Jakarta Province), Banda Aceh City (Aceh Province), and Makassar City (South Sulawesi Province). The selection of these cities was based on the consideration of representing the regions of Sumatra, Java, and Sulawesi as significant Muslim demographic centers in Indonesia.

The sampling technique applied was purposive random sampling, with

a total of 670 millennial Muslim respondents. Respondents were categorized into three groups: university students (male and female), civil servants/ASN (male and female), and the Muslim middle class. These three categories were distributed proportionally across all research locations. Data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Form, then disseminated through social media platforms—WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, and Facebook—to respondents in each city, following a stage of instrument validation.

The collected data were processed manually through a process of numerical data entry, followed by tabulation and grouping based on closed-ended and open-ended questions. The mean of each variable was then visualized in the form of tables and diagrams to facilitate the analytical description process. Data analysis followed the procedure developed by (Miles & Huberman, 1994), namely data reduction, presentation of empirical data, drawing conclusions, and data verification. In the operational process, data were grouped by gender, domicile, and religious affiliation. The final stage of analysis was data interpretation, presented in the form of textual narrative to answer the research questions regarding the embedded identity and the factors shaping the identity of millennial Muslims.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1.1. Patterns of Millennial Muslim Identity Formation

This section elaborates on the process of millennial Muslim identity formation and the social contexts surrounding it. Drawing on the conceptualization of (Erikson, 1989), identity is an experience embedded within the individual through a continuous developmental cycle that may undergo change under certain conditions. Thus, the identity formation experienced by millennial Muslims constitutes a process of externalization from the socio-cultural environment that is subsequently internalized into the self, forming a character that is relatively resistant to substantial change. This study finds that the identity acknowledgment declared by millennial Muslims manifests through six main indicators: (1) the active updating of religious information; (2) the intensity of story-sharing with family; (3) the frequency of interaction with fellow Muslims; (4) the frequency of interaction with non-Muslims; (5) the frequency of cross-ethnic interaction; and (6) the frequency of interaction with the same ethnic group.

Table 1. Patterns of Millennial Muslim Identity Formation in Indonesia

Statement	Mean	Percentage (%)	Category
Always Up-to-Date on Religious Issues	2.31	57.76	Low
Frequently Shares Stories with Family	3.01	75.34	Moderate
Frequently Interacts with Fellow Muslims	3.68	91.98	High
Frequently Interacts with Non-Muslims	2.60	64.69	Moderate
Frequently Interacts Across Ethnic Groups	3.06	76.57	Moderate
Frequently Interacts with Same Ethnic Group	3.21	80.15	High
Overall Mean	2.98	74.46	Moderate

Source: Primary Research Data (2022–2023). Scale: 1–4; Category: Low (<60%), Moderate (60–79%), High (≥80%)

The data in Table 1 reveals a compelling pattern of social identity construction among millennial Muslims that merits deeper analysis. Interaction with the co-religious community records the highest figure at 91.98%, making it the dominant variable in the pattern of identity formation. This figure indicates that internal Muslim community cohesion plays a highly significant role as a marker of group identity. The second position is occupied by intensity of interaction with the same ethnic group (80.15%), reflecting the strength of ethnicity-based cultural bonds within the social ecosystem of millennial Muslims.

By contrast, engagement with religious issues in digital space records the lowest figure (57.76%)—a finding that contrasts with the general assumption about a generation closely associated with technology. This pattern indicates that for millennial Muslims, digital space functions more as a medium for the circulation of information than as the primary arena for the formation of religious values and orientations. The foundation of identity appears to be more strongly built through direct social relations rooted in religion, family, and local culture—rather than through active participation in digital religious discourse. The overall mean of 74.46% (Moderate category) reflects that the process of identity formation is still dominated by primary social structures compared to the influence of digital space.

4.1.2. Millennial Muslim Identity Recognition

Table 2. Millennial Muslim Identity Recognition in Indonesia

Identity Indicator	Mean	Percentage (%)	Category
Recognized as Muslim by fellow Muslims	3.03	75.82	Important
Recognized as Muslim by non-Muslims	2.97	74.25	Important
Recognized as Muslim on social media	2.81	70.37	Important
Identity based on shared ethnicity	2.90	72.43	Important
Identity across ethnic differences	2.59	64.78	Important
Ascribed identity (innate to oneself)	3.36	83.92	Very Important
Same family bonds	3.23	80.63	Very Important
Identity based on shared region	3.05	76.34	Important
Identity across regional differences	2.64	65.90	Important
Overall Mean	2.95	73.83	Important

Source: Primary Research Data (2022–2023). Scale: 1–4; Category: Important (70–79%), Very Important (≥80%)

Table 2 reveals that millennial Muslim identity recognition as a whole falls within the Important category, with an overall mean of 73.83%. Among all measured indicators, two variables stand out significantly above the average: ascribed identity (innate to oneself) (83.92%) and same family bonds (80.63%), both of which are categorized as Very Important. This finding affirms that the legitimacy of identity among millennial Muslims rests primarily on two foundations: the primordial dimension, which is ascetic in nature, and the familial affective dimension, which is emotional-cultural in character.

Of the nine indicators analyzed, all are categorized as Important to Very Important by respondents. Identity recognition through social media records the lowest figure among all other indicators (70.37%), though it still falls within the Important category. This demonstrates that although digital space is

acknowledged as a relevant arena for identity, its legitimacy weight remains below that of recognition derived from direct social relations—whether in religious, familial, or regional contexts.

This pattern informs us of a hierarchy of identity legitimacy among millennial Muslims: recognition from primary social relations (family and co-religious community) occupies the most central position, followed by recognition based on cultural-ethnic affiliation, and then by recognition based on digital space. This finding challenges the assumption that the digital generation automatically relocates the center of gravity of their identity to virtual space, and instead affirms that deeply rooted social structures remain the primary reference point in the process of self-legitimation.

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that the formation of millennial Muslim identity in Indonesia cannot be understood through the lens of a linear shift from tradition to digital modernity. More than a mere transition, this process constitutes a negotiation that unfolds simultaneously and in a multilayered manner. Religious identity within this group emerges as the outcome of a dialectic between the stability of cultural-traditional values and the dynamics of the new social spaces afforded by information technology. This is consistent with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which affirms that cultural identity is always produced within the third space, where meaning is never final but is continuously negotiated through complex symbolic encounters (Easthope, 2013).

The structural persistence of primary social structures in validating individual identity is clearly evidenced by these findings. The variable of ascribed identity reaches 83.92% and same family bonds reaches 80.63%. The dominance of these figures indicates that despite the high dependence of the millennial generation on the digital ecosystem, their identity legitimacy remains strongly rooted in emotional relations and direct social experiences. This phenomenon intersects with the theory of primordialism, which views identity as an entity that tends to remain fixed and bound to social origins that were established long before the era of digitalization.

An even more striking finding is the discontinuity between the intensity of technology use and participation in digital religious discourse: engagement with religious issues on social media falls to the lowest point (57.76%). This pattern indicates that for millennial Muslims, digital media is more utilized as a channel for communication and knowledge distribution than as a source for the

formation of fundamental religious values. Digital space thus functions as an additional arena of articulation, while the foundation of identity continues to rest on patterns of social interaction directly rooted in religion and local culture.

From the perspective of hybridity, the high level of interaction with the co-religious community (91.98%) and with the same ethnic group (80.15%) indicates that digital space is utilized as a medium to more adaptively reproduce group identity. This pattern opens a space for renegotiating traditional values when confronted with global discourse and digital religious practices. This process produces an identity that is ambivalent in nature: on one hand, millennial Muslims preserve tradition as a foundation; on the other, they demonstrate a strong reliance on the digital ecosystem as a medium of expression (Bamualim et al., 2018).

Variations in findings across different sample cities—such as Padang and Palembang, which possess distinctive socio-cultural configurations—reinforce the argument that the constructivist approach is relevant for understanding identity as a response to symbolic structures that are geographically and historically specific. Locality in this context is not marginalized by the currents of globalization; rather, it becomes an active space where identity negotiation continues to unfold (Astuti, 2017) (Thompson, 2019). Millennial Muslims thus emerge as relational products between local values and global influences that continuously interact in a dynamic manner (Bamualim et al., 2018).

Ultimately, identity hybridity among millennial Muslims in Indonesia does not merely indicate fragmentation or identity crisis, but rather reflects the reflexive capacity of subjects to respond to digital transformation without relinquishing the symbolic roots that have shaped them (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2017; Bamualim et al., 2018). Digitalization does not erase the roots of religiosity, but rather drives the emergence of forms of religious practice that are more complex and contextual. Millennial Muslim identity exists in a state of becoming—a process of becoming—in which the marriage of traditional values and digital modernity forms a unique entity that distinguishes them from previous generations, particularly in terms of the speed of adaptation and the capacity for negotiation with contemporary religious phenomena.

Studies that harbor suspicion that digitalization has the potential to uproot traditional values and replace them with a new, uniform culture (Schaefer, 2015; Mannheim, 1929) need to be reconsidered in the context of Indonesian millennial Muslims. The findings of this study actually demonstrate

that the construction of traditional cultural and religious values proceeds in parallel with modernization—mutually supporting and reinforcing one another, rather than in a mutually negating relation. In certain situations, millennial Muslims cannot detach themselves from the traditions that have shaped their consciousness and worldview (Breuner, 2011), while in other situations, they are highly dependent on digital devices as part of the rhythm of daily life. It is precisely this condition that demands further in-depth inquiry to understand the patterns of millennial Muslim identity development in the future (Bamualim et al., 2018; Ichwan et al., 2024).

5. Conclusion

This study has successfully demonstrated that the identity of millennial Muslims in Indonesia is formed through a complex and multilayered process, in which religion, local culture, and digital space play simultaneous yet differing roles in terms of weight of influence. The marriage of traditional values and the influence of digitalization has given rise to an identity that is hybrid in nature—a configuration that cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy between tradition and modernity (Bamualim et al., 2018). The identity hybridization that occurs among millennial Muslims is not merely an inevitable consequence of modernization and technological development, but is rather the product of an active negotiation process between deeply rooted social-religious foundations and the continuously evolving digital dynamics.

The most significant finding of this study is that primary social structures—particularly family bonds and the co-religious community—remain the most determinant variables in the formation and recognition of millennial Muslim identity, even amid the intensity of their engagement with the digital world. Digital space functions as a complementary arena for identity articulation, not as a substitute for the existing socio-cultural foundation. The implications of these findings affirm the need for a more integrative approach in understanding the religiosity of the millennial generation: one that is capable of accommodating the traditional dimension while acknowledging the transformative role of digital space without neglecting either.

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